

# Ladysmith Black Mambazo coming to Annenberg

## Group keeps traditional music alive for four decades

**Rita Charleston**  
Tribune Correspondent

In a career that spans over 40 years, South Africa's Ladysmith Black Mambazo has garnered multiple Grammy awards, nominations and critical acclaim, and continues to sell out concerts in prestigious venues worldwide. Their next stop will be the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts on Jan. 31.

The troupe was assembled in the 1960s in South Africa by Joseph Shabalala, who approached his cousins Albert Mazibuko and his brother to join the group in singing traditional and time-honored songs.

"I remember it was mid-morning in October, 1969 when Joseph, who is

our cousin, came to us to help him achieve what he wanted with his music," Mazibuko said recently during a phone conversation. "He explained he wanted to make the kind of music that had helped make our people strong, and so we agreed to join him. And from then on, with all the practices, competitions and appearances, we've never stopped."

In the mid-'80s, Paul Simon visited South Africa and incorporated Black Mambazo's rich sound into his "Graceland" album. A year later, Simon produced the group's first U.S. release, "Shaka Zulu," which won a Grammy in 1988. Many more awards were soon to come their way.

Their latest release,

"Always With Us," pays tribute to Nellie Shabalala, the late wife of Black Mambazo founder-leader Joseph. Shabalala.

According to Mazibuko, "Nellie was not just Joseph's wife. She was a mother, sister-in-law or cousin to every member of our group. She helped us at home in so many ways, and when we were traveling the world. In Zulu we have a phrase which means someone who is no longer with us in body but stays with us in spirit. Singing with Nellie on these songs gave us peace and allows us to honor her life."

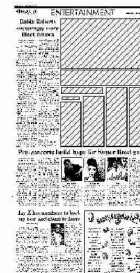
Having worked with such artists as Bono, Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, Celine Dion and many, many more, Mazibuko says their music is understood and appreciated all over the globe. "That's amazing but I think that's the power of music. You don't have to understand the words,

you just have to enjoy the sounds."

Together after all these years, Mazibuko says there have been some changes within the group. "I would say we've not so much changed as developed, is the best way to put it. There are some new, younger members in the group who bring a lot of energy to the stage.

"And in the beginning, we had a message that was telling people to unite. Now we are looking around and watching all that's happened and all that we have achieved in our lifetime." However, he adds, if there is a challenge, "It is trying to keep traditional music alive, because there is new technology, a new way of singing, and young people are eager to explore what is new. That's OK, but they should never forget where they came from."

For times and ticket information, call (215) 898-3900.





**Ladysmith Black Mambazo will perform at the Annenberg Cener on Jan. 31.** — SUBMITTED PHOTO